



Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape

By Frans de Waal, Frans Lanting

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This remarkable primate with the curious name is challenging established views on human evolution. The bonobo, least known of the great apes, is a female-centered, egalitarian species that has been dubbed the "make-love-not-war" primate by specialists. In bonobo society, females form alliances to intimidate males, sexual behavior (in virtually every partner combination) replaces aggression and serves many social functions, and unrelated groups mingle instead of fighting. The species's most striking achievement is not tool use or warfare but sensitivity to others.

In the first book to combine and compare data from captivity and the field, Frans de Waal, a world-renowned primatologist, and Frans Lanting, an internationally acclaimed wildlife photographer, present the most up-to-date perspective available on the bonobo. Focusing on social organization, de Waal compares the bonobo with its better-known relative, the chimpanzee. The bonobo's relatively nonviolent behavior and the tendency for females to dominate males confront the evolutionary models derived from observing the chimpanzee's male power politics, cooperative hunting, and intergroup warfare. Further, the bonobo's frequent, imaginative sexual contacts, along with its low reproduction rate, belie any notion that the sole natural purpose of sex is procreation. Humans share over 98 percent of their genetic material with the bonobo and the chimpanzee. Is it possible that the peaceable bonobo has retained traits of our common ancestor that we find hard to recognize in ourselves?

Eight superb full-color photo essays offer a rare view of the bonobo in its native habitat in the rain forests of Zaire as well as in zoos and research facilities. Additional photographs and highlighted interviews with leading bonobo experts complement the text. This book points the way to viable alternatives to male-based models of human evolution and will add considerably to debates on the origin of our species. Anyone interested in primates, gender issues, evolutionary psychology, and exceptional wildlife photography will find a fascinating companion in *Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape*.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

For Frans de Waal, man is not the only moral entity, as he made clear in his last book--*Good Natured: The Origins of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*. The author has long been intrigued by chimpanzee politics and mores, and now he has turned his human heart and scientific mind to a species science has tended to celebrate solely for its sex drive. Bonobos may look like chimps, but they are actually even closer to us--far more upright, physically, for a start. Furthermore, where chimpanzees hunt, fight, and politic like mad, bonobos are peaceful, often ambisexual, and matriarchal. (Of course, hyenas are matriarchal too, but that's another story ...) De Waal's collaborator, Frans Lanting, has been photographing these gentle creatures for some years and augments the primatologist's explorations and interviews with hundreds of superb color shots. The penultimate picture is of bonobos crossing a road while schoolchildren stand watching, a short distance away. If, as the truism goes, all books about animal behavior are ultimately about us, this exploration of the bonobo may be a step in the right direction.

From [Booklist](#)

Bonobos, formerly called "pygmy chimpanzees," are the least known of the great apes. This wonderful book by a preeminent primatologist does much to introduce the general reader to one of our closest relatives. Covering studies undertaken both in captivity and in the species' natural habitat in Zaire, de Waal's riveting account compares bonobo behavior with that of the better-known chimpanzee and with humans. Complemented by Frans Lanting's coffee-table-quality photographs of wild and captive bonobos, the chapters cover the discovery of the bonobo (in 1929), its habitat and how it shaped the species' behavior, and the fears for the future of wild bonobos in an unstable region. Interviews with researchers provide a full picture of scientific studies, and extensive notes pertaining to each chapter explain many concepts in greater detail. This highly recommended book should be in all libraries. One minor warning: bonobos engage in all forms of sexual contact, and this behavior is fully explored in both the text and the photos. *Nancy Bent*

From Kirkus Reviews

Notes toward an understanding of the bonobo, Africa's most elusive primate, from the always engaging de Waal, a noted primatologist (*Good Natured*, 1996). De Waal and photographer Lanting have crafted a book likely to appeal to a large audience, combining hard-won information with superb, provocative images. The bonobo, a close relative of the chimpanzee, exists only in a tiny community in the remote forest reaches of northern Zaire. It has been the subject of little research, yet what is known of the species (through fieldwork and zoo studies) is intriguing. The bonobo, de Waal notes, is "a creature of considerable intellect with a secure sense of its place in the world . . . so akin to ourselves that the dividing line is seriously blurred." But the bonobo is very much its own species, living in a peaceful egalitarian society (female dominant), one that substitutes sex for aggression, with "a varied, almost imaginative, eroticism." While the sexual aspect is absorbing and gets plenty of attention here, de Waal also probes social organization, methods of raising offspring, modes of communication, and status in the wild. He knits together the work done on bonobos (displaying an impressive talent for synthesizing his own work with that of others and presenting it in a commonsensical, elegant voice), and provides some clearly argued theories about why bonobo society is the way it is: Prolonged sexual attractiveness in the females, it is suggested, led to same-sex sexuality, which led to female alliances and thus female dominance; in males, a reduced competition for mates led to reduced alliances, obscured paternity, and reduced infanticide. Sadly, even in its obscure patch of land the peaceful bonobo is threatened, stalked by poachers and facing a dwindling habitat. A fascinating, delightfully successful treatment of an arresting creature. (75 color photos, 9 b&w photos, 9 maps and drawings) --
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Users Review

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